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ABSTRACT

Lee Canter's Assertive Discipline method was studied using a survey of 72 high school teachers' attitudes. Assertive Discipline calls for firm but fair rules, negative consequences for inappropriate behavior, and positive consequences for positive behavior, all set by the teacher. After a lengthy literature review, the survey is discussed. Sixty-eight percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt it necessary to use methods other than Assertive Discipline in the classroom, while 20 percent had no opinion. Teachers believed that students should be involved in classroom management and were eager to try a student-involved classroom management process. At the same time however, 73 percent disagreed with allowing students to help set rules and consequences in the classroom. Teachers felt that conflict resolution and the democratic process were important in classroom management. Results indicated that teachers would not favor and might not obey a packaged discipline program. The paper concludes that teachers should be allowed to choose a classroom management process that suits the teacher's style, students, and subject to be taught, and that students should be encouraged to be active members of classroom management and the discipline process. Appendices provide a list of classroom rules, a classroom management survey, teacher comments, survey data, and a consent letter. (Contains 37 references.) (JDD)

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ED 379 207

A STUDY OF ASSERTIVE DISCIPLINE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT METHODS

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INTRODUCTION

Classroom management and discipline have always been a point of concern for classroom teachers (Rose, 1987). During the 1960s, the concern truly represented a nationwide panic, particularly with the 1969 Gallup Poll on education (Duke & Jones, 1984). As a result of this era in educational history, a group of discipline models were born to address the urgent concerns of the public (King et al., 1987). Assertive Discipline was produced by Lee Canter during the early 1970s in order to deal with classroom management (Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989).

Assertive Discipline was an attractive method of classroom management for the teacher. It gave outlines for rule-setting and consequences for misbehavior (Crockenburg, 1982). However, other views on discipline suggested that students should be instructed in the value of democracy and resolving conflicts (Crockenburg, 1982; Osborne, 1984; Parkhurst, 1988; Watson, 1982; Williams, 1984).

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper was to study Lee Canter's Assertive Discipline method by utilizing a survey and responses from two high schools in the Birdville Independent School District. Another purpose was to provide recommendations for more effective methods of classroom management.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITTERATURE

From the time of the first classrooms, discipline and classroom management have most likely been a point of concern (Rose, 1987). Dewey (1915) believed that democratic ideals should be reflected in the management of the classroom. However, in the 1930s, discipline and classroom management were not extensively covered in schools of education (McDaniel, 1986). Teachers were merely taught to keep a firm hand on the students.

The Gallup Polls of the late 1960s brought discipline to the forefront in the minds of the American public (Duke & Jones, 1984; McDaniel, 1986; Rose, 1987). During this time, a general unrest in the student population grew to a rejection of rules on what seemed to be a nationwide basis (Duke & Jones, 1984). There was an increasingly strong call from politicians for schools to get stricter on the students in order to get the discipline crisis under control (Rose, 1987).

Out of the crisis of the 1960s, several discipline methods were suggested. They ranged from the traditional "spare the rod and spoil the child" approach to more student-directed approaches (Rose, 1987).

Several discipline models were produced. Discipline models gave the educator guidelines to manage the discipline of the classroom (Martinez, 1986). Models seemed to be of two different types: obedience models which controlled the student's behavior, and responsibility models which had the students take responsibility for their own behavior (Curwin & Mendler, 1988). In 1976, Assertive Discipline, an obedience or control model was produced by Lee and Marlene Canter (Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989).

Lee Canter attended California State University at Northridge and received a B. A. in history and education in 1968. He attended the University of Southern California receiving a masters degree in social work. Dr. Canter and his wife Marlene worked with students with behavior problems. Given his interdisciplinary background, Dr. Canter generated the idea for Assertive Discipline after conducting a study of teachers who had good classroom management skills (Mitchell et al., 1989; Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989). Barrett (1985) stated that Dr. Canter also patterned the initial model after assertion training that had been used extensively in the private sector. Canter (1976) stated that the method was perfected due to he

and his wife's work with children with behavior problems. They had consulted with teachers that were effective in the classroom with such behavior problems.

"The premise of the Assertive Discipline model is the right of a teacher to teach, and the right of a teacher to expect students to obey" (King et al., 1987, p. 8). Dr. Canter (1979) has stated that there are four main objectives of the Assertive Discipline model. These objectives are: (1) a set of consistent and firm but fair rules be set by the teacher, (2) a set of negative consequences be set by the teacher for inappropriate behavior, (3) a set of positive consequences be set by the teacher for positive behavior, and (4) the teacher is to create a plan for implementation of the negative and positive consequences for the rules (See Appendix A for sample rules and consequences).

Dr. Canter has stated that students must be given negative consequences when they misbehave and positive consequences for good behavior (Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989). The purpose of the model is not to punish misbehavior, but to prevent it from occurring (McCormack, 1987). Basically, teachers are in complete control of the classroom from setting the rules to deciding consequences for disruptions (Vasa, 1984). The needs of the teacher are the most paramount needs in the classroom. The needs of the student are secondary (Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989).

Assertive Discipline has been nationally accepted (Davidman & Davidman, 1984; McCormack, 1987). It has been taught to over 750,000 educators through Canter and Associates training seminars (Canter, 1989). In addition to the Canter-directed training, several books by Dr. Canter were published as well as filmstrips and videotapes which made the approach widely available and accessible to teachers of all levels of experience (Moles,

1989). Given the availability, Rose (1987) then studied the implementation of Assertive Discipline.

Questionnaires were sent to a random sample of school principals selected from a national list. The principals evenly represented elementary, middle school, and high school, as well as rural, suburban, and urban schools. The results showed that the method was widely accepted with many schools systems having their educators trained in Assertive Discipline. There was a slightly higher acceptance from female principals from medium-sized schools (e. g. 900 - 1200).

Assertive Discipline was attractive to both teacher and administrator with its straightforward approach to discipline. It gave clear instruction of rule setting, rewards, and consequences. It was also easy to use and understand, and it seemed to have the potential to restore classroom order (Crockenburg, 1982).

With such a widespread acceptance and implementation of the Assertive Discipline model, educators began to see the need for research to accurately judge their effectiveness (Barrett, 1985). However, there was a lack of empirical research on Assertive Discipline (Duke & Jones, 1984; Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989; Vasa, 1984). Much of the research that had been done was based on opinions, questionnaires, and ethnographic study (Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989).

Mitchell et al. (1989) studied the perceptions of all levels of teachers regarding the Assertive Discipline. The intent of the research was to study the opinions of teachers based on grade level, sex, and teaching experience. The instrument was a survey that was provided to all certified teaching staff in the Quitman Consolidated School District. Sixty one percent of the surveys were returned. The conclusions showed that junior high teachers,

grades 6 - 9, found the Assertive Discipline model effective. However, both elementary and high school teachers found the model ineffective with the age groups that they taught. The researchers also concluded that the "effectiveness" of Assertive Discipline warranted additional research.

Barrett (1986) also studied the effects of Assertive Discipline training,but with pre-service elementary teachers regarding student respect, anxiety levels, and other factors. One hundred and two pre-service teachers participated in the study which included questionnaires, pre-tests and post-tests. With regard to anxiety levels and concerns over teaching, no significant differences were found between pre-service teachers with Assertive Discipline and those teachers who had not been trained. Also, pupil control and concern about the impact of teaching revealed no significant differences. In another study, McCormack (1986) stated that there was a five percent decrease in the off-task behavior of students in classrooms with teachers who were trained in the Assertive Discipline method. The decrease was far less than the 80% reduction that was claimed by the proponents of the model (Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989). Chance (1986) researched a number of discipline models, including Assertive Discipline, and found that none were superior, and the teacher should have incorporated parts of each to suit his or her needs.

There were also qualitative studies on Assertive Discipline. Dana (1992) performed an ethnographic study on five white student teachers and their reactions to a multicultural situation in the inner city. The basic intent was to determine how an Anglo student teacher must be prepared for a multicultural classroom setting. The student teachers were to maintain a daily log of experiences, thoughts, and ideas. Also, qualitative interviews and on-site participant observations were used for data collection. All of this

information was scrutinized for the emergence of patterns in teaching styles, conflicts, discipline problems as well as other factors. The patterns of the above teaching factors were addressed using conversations and situations for examples. In dealing with discipline, four of the student teachers implemented Assertive Discipline. All of them had negative experiences with the discipline model in the inner city situation. As for discipline training, the conclusion was supported that teachers must be taught not to see pre-packaged discipline models, such as Assertive Discipline, as the only answer to classroom management. The classroom management methods that a pre-service teacher incorporated into his or her multicultural classroom should be examined in relationship to the student population.

McDaniel (1989) also held that Assertive Discipline could be a process that a teacher could employ to resolve discipline problems, but it was not the only answer. Moles (1989) further summarized various studies on Assertive Discipline. His findings stated that teacher perceptions did support positive response in several of the studies. However, student behaviors and attitudes did not show the same positive effects. Several of the studies showed no effect attributed to the model, and some showed that there were negative effects. Research in the classroom had begun to reveal that pre-packaged discipline programs, such as Assertive Discipline, had a tendency to be insensitive to the differences among students. Duke and Jones (1984) stated that teachers must realize that institutionalized plans failed to address the individual needs of the students.

With little empirical research, many of the related articles have been opinionated. Several authors have reported successes, such as increased time on task and students spending less time out of their seats, with Assertive Discipline (Martinez Unified School District, 1983; McCormack,

1987, 1989; McDaniel, 1989). There have also been articles that have shown opposition to Assertive Discipline concerning student morale, long term effects, and the stifling of student creativity and originality (Curwin & Mendler, 1989; Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989).

Gartrell (1987) interviewed several persons who had attended public school in the 1930s and 1940s. Most of the experiences that they could recall were of negative consequences. Children entering public school in the first grade need to have their self-esteem bostered and negative experiences at such an early age can alter the course of the student's educational career. Other attributes, such as student responsibility and critical thinking skills, may also be affected by packaged discipline models such as Assertive Discipline.

Curwin and Mendler (1988) stated that packaged discipline models were rigid and did not lend themselves to teaching the student responsibility. Duke and Jones (1984) held that teachers saw the "packaged" programs as insensitive to student, grade, and even school differences. It was also stated that Assertive Discipline was merely behavior modificatiop and did not create critical thinkers or students that were capable of making decisions (Curwin & Mendler, 1989). Watson (1982) contended that with the advent of working mothers, the schools had an increasingly important role in socializing our children to what will be acceptable in our society. Schools needed to teach children not only to follow rules, but also to internalize them so that they followed rules without an external punishment or reward.

With such opinions, several recommendations have been made for other methods that may be more effective than Assertive Discipline in the management of the classroom. For example, aggressive behavior was reduced in a study of a school which had introduced conflict resolution

training for its teachers as a supplement to Assertive Discipline (Parkhurst, 1988). Darddaine Ragguet (1993) studied urban and suburban elementary students and reported that teachers using conflict resolution training can reduce violence in our society (schools) as well as other non-violent conflicts that may arise. In another study, Syster (1993) found that students that were trained in conflict resolution methods tended to be less confrontive and more solution-oriented than students not trained in conflict resolution methods.

There are several conflict resolution approaches for educators to utilize in the classroom. Good & Brophy (1987) state that there are benefits gained from teachers trained in conflict resolution strategies. The first is the willingness to assume responsibility and the second is effective control of the behavior over the long term. These strategies are not a discipline program, but rather are situational in nature and allow the student's individual needs to be met. Gordon's "Teacher Effectiveness Training", and Glasser's "Ten Steps to Good Discipline" have been purported by Good and Brophy to be effective conflict resolution approaches to classroom management.

Another means of resolving conflict is the teaching of democratic values through emulating a democratic society (Osborne, 1984; Watson, 1982). Education in democracy is a concern of the American public. In the 25th annual Gallup Poll, 93% of the persons responded that democracy is a value that should be taught in our schools (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1993). The autocratic nature of the traditional classroom does not guarantee order, nor does the democratic classroom imply permissiveness. "The basic cause of conflict in the classroom is social inequality among individuals and groups. If the social relationship among people is unstable, it inevitably leads to conflict and disharmony" (Dreikurs, Grundwald, & Pepper, 1982, p. 67).

Dreikurs, Grundwald, and Pepper (1982) go on to characterize a democratic classroom as the teacher and students united in the effort to plan, organize, and implement the activities of the classroom. Children cannot just begin this type of corporate effort without instruction. Students must be trained to be able to function and take responsibility in the democratic classroom. Classroom management techniques that are based on external control, such as Assertive Discipline, do not teach democracy, but teach autocracy (Watson, 1982).

Many educators recommend that the classroom be the place for the student to be active in the setting of the policy and learning democratic values (Crockenburg, 1982; Dewey, 1915; Parkhurst, 1988; Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989). Students must be a functioning member of society who can make responsible decisions. The teachers must reduce their role as directors and have students take more responsibility for the management of the classroom (Heuchert, 1989). Even earlier proponents in education have held similar views. For example, Dewey (1915) states,

> If we train our children to take orders, to do things simply because they are told to, and fail to give them confidence to act and think for themselves, we are putting an almost insurmountable obstacle in the way of overcoming the present defects of our system and of establishing the truth of democratic ideals. (p. 304)

What was important during Dewey's time seems to be important today. Crockenburg (1982), Heuchert (1989), and Parkhurst (1988) all contend that democracy and the ability of a student to fuction in our society is one of the most important lessons that a student can learn in our schools.

PROCEDURES

The purpose of this paper was to study the Assertive Discipline method in two schools within a school district and to provide recommendations for effective discipline methods for these classroom teachers. The descriptive study and further recommendations followed sequential steps.

Prior to the distribution of a survey, the TWU Human Subjects Review Committee application was completed and submitted in December, 1993. The approval for the survey was received on January 18, 1994 (See Appendix B).

The anonymous survey was also approved by the principal of both campuses about January 20, 1994. Then the survey and participants' release form were distributed to the subjects about January 24, 1994 (See Appendices C & D). The survey was distributed to teachers in Haltom High School (N = approximately 150 teachers) and Richland High School (N = approximately 150 teachers) in the Birdville Independent School District (ISD).

The participants of both campuses seemed to be confused by the release form that prefaced the survey. Many questions about the form were directed to the author, and some teachers refused to sign the form or do the survey because of the form.The teachers were to complete the survey and return it to the coordinating educator at designated for each campus. For the Haltom campus, the author was the coordinating educator, and Debra Ellis was the coordinating educator for the Richland campus.

These two campuses were similar in size with approximately 2,400 students. The student populations were also similar with respect to socioeconomic status (SES) and cultural diversity, with an increase in Asian students at Haltom High School of approximately 150 students.

The survey was oriented toward classroom management and discipline methods. It included a Likert scale with 10 accompanying statements (See Appendix D). The end of the survey also had a section for comments.

Follow-up surveys were given to the educators of both campuses about February 25, 1994 to improve the response rate of for the survey. Acceptance of the follow-up surveys was limited to the surveys recieved on or before 10th of March. Of the 300 total educators for both campuses, 72 surveys, or approximately 25% were returned on or before the March 10th deadline.

CONCLUSIONS

The author's intent in writing this professional paper was to gather information on two primary questions. Teachers have vastly different styles of teaching in the classroom, different student populations, and different subjects. (1) Should a district institute a packaged discipline method as the classroom management policy for all teachers in a district? (2) Would teachers be interested in a more student-centered classroom management method?

There were two statements, namely numbers 8 and 10, which were specifically concerned with teachers' attitudes about Assertive Discipline. Seventy-two surveys were returned from both of the high school campuses in Birdville ISD. Of those responding, 68% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt it necessary to use methods other than Assertive Discipline in the classroom (statement number 10). 20% had no opinion to the same statement (See Appendix E). These figures are backed up strongly by some of the opinions and statements given on the comments section of the survey (See Appendix F for selected comments).

Another statement, number 8, concerned itself with a teacher's 15

satisfaction with Assertive Discipline as a method of classroom management. Although the majority of the teachers responded in agreement with this statement, more teachers at both campuses chose no opinion on this question than on any other question. The responses and comments suggest that a classroom management policy which involves a packaged discipline program would not be favored and even may not be obeyed by teachers.

There were several questions, such as statement numbers 3, 4, and 5, that centered around students being involved in the management of the classroom. Statements 3 and 5 probed the teacher's beliefs on student involvement in the classroom and their eagerness to try a student-involved classroom management process. Both statements were met with a high agreement percentage with 64% and 60%, either strongly agree or agree respectively.

Two statements, numbers 6 and 7, were concerned with the teacher's beliefs that conflict resolution and the democratic process were important in the classroom management process. These statements were met with responses of strongly agree or agree, 80% and 72% respectively. Question number 4, concerning current student involvement in the classroom, was met with the opposite responses. 73% responded either disagree or strongly disagree to allowing students to help set rules and consequences in the classroom. However, the practice of letting students be involved in rule-setting has not been widely practiced in Birdville due to the training in Assertive discipline. There were some teachers who responded to the statements by writing comments such as "sometimes" or "never" over a statement or by adding another number to the Likert scale. This represented a minor percentage of some of the questions (not more than 3% on any one question). Most of these additions were linked to comments that the teacher

added in the comments section of the survey which explained the additions. Teacher's overall responses, however, point to an agreement that students should be involved in classroom management process.

The author feels strongly that the results of this survey show that teachers should be allowed to choose a classroom management style that suits the teacher's style, students, and subject that is to be taught. Also, students must be allowed and encouraged to be active members of the management process of the classroom and the discipline process in order to become more effective adults in our society.

More research should be done on the subject of classroom management, and in particular, the effects of packaged discipline programs and student-involved discipline methods such as conflict management.

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Appendix A

Rules:

1. Follow the instructions given the first time.

2. Students must be in the room, and in the seat by the tardy bell.

3. No food or drinks in the room at any times.

4. Give the person talking, whether the teacher or another student, your full attention.

5. Bring your supplies (book, paper, and pen) to class each day.

Consequences:

1. first offense:	2 minutes after the bell
2. second offense:	15 minutes detention
3. third offense:	30 minutes detention
4. fourth offense:	30 minutes detention and call to parents
5. fifth offense:	discipline referral to the office

Any severe offense will be treated as a fifth offense!

These rules and consequences were taken from the classroom of David W. Ellis, Haltom High School

Appendix B

23

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

DENTON/DALLAS/HOUSTON

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW COMMITTEE

OFFICE OF
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January 14, 1994

David W. Ellis
5704 Cedarcrest Dr.
Ft. Worth, TX 76117

Dear David W. Ellis: Social Security #: 462-33-1590

Your study entitled "A Study of Assertive Discipline and Recommendations for Effective Classroom Management Methods" has been reviewed by a committee of the Human Subjects Review Committee and appears to meet our requirements in regard to protection of individuals' rights.

Be reminded that both the University and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regulations typically require that signatures indicating informed consent be obtained from all human subjects in your study. These are to be filed with the Human Subjects Review Committee. Any exception to this requirement is noted below. Furthermore, according to HHS regulations, another review by the Committee is required if your project changes.

Special provisions pertaining to your study are noted below:

__ The filing of signatures of subjects with the Human Subjects Review Committee is not required.

_X_ Your study is exempt from further TWU Human Subjects Review.

___ No special provisions apply.

Sincerely,

Patti Harrington

Chairman
Human Subjects Review Committee

cc: Graduate School
Dr. P.J. Karr-Kidwell, Educational Leadership
Dr. Howard Stone, Educational Leadership

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Appendix C

Dear Participants:

Thank you for considering the possibility of participating in a research project concerning classroom management. The purpose of the research is to study discipline methods, Assertive Discipline, and make recommendations for effective classroom management methods. In the study, I will ask you to participate by filling out the survey on classroom management.

I do not foresee any potential risk to you with regards to your participation in this study. I do expect that the information that you provide will benefit Haltom High School by highlighting the classroom management needs of the educators of the district.

When the final report is complete, no names will be used to protect the confidentiality of the information you have provided. The records from the study will be maintained at my home for three years from the end of the study with access controlled by myself.

I do not expect there to be any risk to you as a result of this study. However, you should be informed that no medical service or compensation is provided to the subjects by the university as a result of injury form participation in research. If you have any questions about the research, or if you need to contact someone regarding a research-related injury, please contact David W. Ellis at (817) 581-5300 or (817) 831-7955.

If you have any questions about the way this research has been conducted, contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Grants Administration.

Please read the following statement carefully before signing this consent form.

An offer to answer all of my questions regarding the study has been made and I have been given a copy of the dated and signed consent form. If alternative procedures are more advantageous to me, they have been explained. A description of the possible attendant discomfort and risk reasonable to expect have been discussed with me. I understand that I may terminate my participation in the study at any time.

_____ _____

Subject Date

Appendix D

Classroom Management Survey

Classroom management and discipline methods are a day to day part of our lives as professional educators. The following survey is designed to find out your opinions and comments on this vital subject. The information you give will be used anonymously

Please respond to the following questions and statements and return the survey to the box of the coordinating educator from your school that is given at the end of the survey. ***Thank you*** for your participation in this study.

General Information

☐ - Haltom High School ☐ - Richland High School

Subject taught (most of the day) _____

Grade level (most of the day)_____

I have had professional training in Assertive Discipline. ☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, when and where did you receive training? _____

_____

_____

For the following statements, circle the number that ***BEST*** corresponds to your response from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I feel that I maintain good classroom discipline	1	2	3	4	5
2. Most of my discipline problems are handled within the classroom (without office involvement)	1	2	3	4	5
3. Students should be involved in the discipline process of the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I allow students to help set rules and consequences for behavior in my classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am willing to try a more student involved classroom management process.	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. The ability for students to resolve conflicts is an important lesson for classroom management.	1	2	3	4	5
7. It is important for students to understand the democratic process in relation to classroom management.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am satisfied with Assertive Discipline as a classroom management method.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel that I have been well trained in the use of Assertive Discipline.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I feel it necessary to use methods other than Assertive Discipline for discipline in my classroom.	1	2	3	4	5

If you have any comments about the survey or classroom management, use the space provided._____

Again ***Thanks*** for your participation in this research project!

David W. Ellis

Coordinating Educator:

Debra K. Ellis

Appendix E

Survey Analysis

Percentage Total of Both Schools

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	48.53	45.59	2.94	2.94	0
2	68.57	31.43	0	0	0
3	13.66	49.57	14.60	17.92	4.23
4	2.90	27.54	7.25	43.48	18.84
5	10.14	50.72	17.39	20.29	1.45
6	25.35	56.34	12.68	5.63	0
7	15.94	55.07	11.59	14.49	2.90
8	4.17	46.23	32.21	16.33	1.02
9	13.04	38.89	20.25	20.48	7.25
10	13.04	55.07	20.29	10.14	1.45

Appendix F

Selected Teacher Comments

1. Assertive Discipline provides a workable framework for classroom management, especially for beginning teachers. It is not universally effective... with older students.

2. I would allow students to set up rules if the office said it was okay.

3. Assertive discipline is most probably an effective program with younger, unruly students. On the junior and senior levels it is too juvenile.

4. The methods that work for some classes do not work for others.

5. Assertive Discipline is not the only answer...99% of effective / good classroom management is the teacher.

6. I do not believe that Assertive Discipline works well on older high school students.

7. When students have pride in their work and a mutual respect exists between students, teachers, and peers, classroom management takes care of itself.

8. My classroom management has been successful because I feel that it is necessary to show each student respect.

9. Assertive Discipline was helpful in the 80's, but not for the 90's generation.

10. Assertive Discipline is a tool that works with some students, but not with all.